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STUDENT-PARENT-COUNSELOR CONFERENCES, AN AID IN EDUCATIONAL PLANNING.

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MORE THAN 100 CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOLS HAVE INVOLVED PARENTS, STUDENTS, AND COUNSELORS IN PLANNING CONFERENCES WHERE TEST SCORES ARE INTERPRETED, FUTURE EDUCATION AND CAREER PLANS IN RELATION TO THE STUDENT'S ABILITY ARE DISCUSSED, AND, IN SOME CASES, THE SCHOOL'S COURSE OFFERINGS ARE EXPLAINED. ATTENDANCE HAS BEEN HIGH AND THE RESULTS SEEM TO INDICATE A MORE REALISTIC VIEW OF STUDENTS, A STIMULATION OF INTEREST IN CAREER PLANNING, AND IMPROVEMENT OF PARENTS' UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION. THE SCHOOLS ORGANIZE THE CONFERENCES IN VARIOUS WAYS. SOME SCHEDULE SUMMER CONFERENCES FOR ALL FRESHMEN AND TRANSFER STUDENTS. OFTEN CONFERENCES ARE SCHEDULED BY GRADE LEVEL. ONE MEASURE OF EVALUATION IS THE SOUNDNESS OF THE STUDENT'S PLANS, AND HIS ABILITY TO CARRY OUT OR CHANGE THOSE PLANS TO FIT CHANGING CONDITIONS. PARENTS ARE GIVEN FORMS ON WHICH TO EVALUATE THE CONFERENCES BY INDICATING THE ADEQUACY OF THE INFORMATION PROVIDED AND RECOMMENDING CHANGES. SAMPLE LETTERS OF INVITATION AND EVALUATION FORMS ARE INCLUDED WITH THE REPORT. (TU)

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AN AID IN EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Pupil Personnel Services has been impressed by reports indicating the marked success high schools in many parts of California have had in conducting student-parent-counselor conferences.

The aim of these three-way interviews is to help the student plan intelligently for the future--for his future education, his future career.

Parents welcome the opportunity of participating in this significant process. They like the idea of coming to a school conference that is not to concern itself with a "discipline problem" or a "failure notice." And, as a result, they feel freer to communicate with the school in the future when questions arise.

The Bureau has prepared this brief description of how these programs are typically carried out, in response to inquiries that have been received--and also in the hope that the publication will stimulate other school systems to emulate the programs described.

On the last page, acknowledgment is made to the school districts that contributed to the preparation of the bulletin by supplying descriptions of their programs.

WILLIAM H. McCREARY, Chief
Bureau of Pupil Personnel Services

STUDENT-PARENT-COUNSELOR CONFERENCES

Three-way conferences involving students, their parents and their counselors are valuable aids to educational planning. This is the gist of reports and comments made by more than 100 California high schools that have recently conducted such conferences.

The outstanding value of the conferences is that parents are systematically brought into an active cooperative role in thinking about and planning for their children's future education and career. All students are involved not just those with academic or personal difficulties.

Parent interest in this activity is high; schools reported parent attendance figures as high as 87, 93, 96, 97, and even 100 per cent of the numbers invited.

From the exchange of information and ideas that takes place during and following typical conferences comes progress toward important goals.

Students' abilities are viewed realistically. After an extensive study of the outcomes, one counselor reported, "Parents agree with counselors 99 times out of a 100 concerning their children's abilities and vocational plans. In many cases parents help students to be realistic in course selection when our counselors and teachers had failed."

Special talents and special needs are identified. "Conferences with parents of incoming freshmen enabled the school to recognize very able and talented students earlier and to program them into challenging classes," said one school official.

Another reported that "After we began the conferences, there was a significant drop in failures caused by students taking courses that were too difficult."

"After our parent conferences with underachieving students we had more success with students bringing up their grades. Some parents sent reports back to the counselors on steps taken by them to alleviate problems at home," one counselor stated.

Systematic career planning is stimulated. "Parents and students were stimulated, often for the first time, to discuss and consider vocational and course selection," one counselor said.

Another put it this way: "Parents are vitally interested in having students' test scores interpreted to them and they are interested in exploring these in relation to future educational and vocational planning."

A school librarian said, "After the parent conferences held in our school more students checked out vocational materials to take home to be used with their parents."

"After our parent conferences more parents and students attended our annual evening career and college programs," a counselor noted in his report.

Parents' understanding and cooperation are improved. "For the first time I realize why my son has to take all those courses and why some of the courses I didn't have to take are required. Schools should explain more to parents," one parent volunteered.

One counselor reported, "Parents continually express their appreciation for being invited to school for individual attention, often for the first time, when students were not experiencing particular difficulties."

"Our counselors are happy with the increased number of parent-school contacts throughout the school year after our summer conferences," a director of guidance said.

Effectiveness of student programming is improved. Teachers in one district reported, "Pupils are scheduled better in conferences. They fit into the curricular pattern better with fewer transfers." In another school the "conferences resulted in the reduction by 83% of program changes due to improper placement in classes."

"Having parent-incoming freshman-counselor conferences has reduced the need for rescheduling and there were fewer failures due to students taking courses too difficult for them," said one counselor.

To sum them up, the goals of student-parent-counselor conferences are to help those involved to:

1. Understand the student's strengths and weaknesses in relation to his education and his career.
2. Acquire knowledge about educational and career opportunities and requirements.
3. Relate the student's abilities and interests to educational and career opportunities and requirements.
4. Make appropriate educational plans and motivate the student to carry them out.

Relation to Ongoing Guidance Program

These conferences are one step or check point in the process of educational-vocational planning. They simply augment the regular guidance services to students, and their success depends in part on the adequate functioning of those services - particularly the follow-up. Through follow-up, decisions made in the conferences are carried out, clarified, or modified as conditions warrant. Often, additional information is secured and further conferences are held, either in person or by telephone. A second series of conferences may be planned. For example, a class that was scheduled for conferences just prior to entering high school may be re-scheduled two years later to ensure proper follow-up and provide opportunity for desirable changes in goals or course selection.

Organizing the Conferences

Usually parent conferences are planned for all students at a particular grade level, e.g., 9th or 10th, rather than for the entire student body. One new high school, with outside financial help, scheduled conferences for all students during the summer prior to the opening of the school but this was an exception to the rule.

A substantial number of high schools that carry out these programs set up conferences for all new students (freshmen and transfers) and their parents in the summer prior to the opening of school, frequently in the month of August. Counselors from the regular staff are given extra employment and are paid either at the rate for adult education teaching (five to six dollars an hour) or at their regular salary rate. They usually work a 40-hour week, four to six weeks, depending upon the number of counselors employed and the number of conferences to be held. Clerical service is provided to assist the staff in mailing letters of invitation, arranging for appointments, receiving telephone calls, and recording information in the students' cumulative records.

The further development of self-reliance is one goal of the 9th grade conferences. "Ninth graders should learn how to plan," one counselor said. "They need to become concerned over the choices they have to make, now and later. They must learn to accept responsibility for making choices and making plans--and for carrying them out."

"If this growth is to take place," he added, "the conferences must be serious counseling sessions, not just friendly visits with students and their parents."

Conferences generally are scheduled for one hour in length. Counselors have found that at least half of the time should be used alike by staff members in discussing with students and their parents

key points or questions from an outline (developed by staff). Further questions of students and parents or the need for additional conferences can be handled in the remaining time. Key points in the interview outline might include the school's offerings and requirements, the student's interests and plans for high school and beyond, his scholastic record, his tentative choice of career if any, his parents' feeling about the soundness of his plans, and similar points.

As a result of such conferences with new students, counselors are able to judge reasonably well which students will require more attention and follow-up as the school year progresses. Counseling priorities can be determined as a guide to scheduling regular student-counselor interviews.

Spring Conferences

Some high schools hold the conferences during the school year, usually in February or March, for an entire class of sophomores or juniors, for example. Selection of time and of class depends on local conditions, of course.

Spring scheduling of conferences permits the counselor to become familiar with his counselees and their plans and problems before the parents are called in. If the conferences are completed early enough, decisions on course selection can be carried out during the late-spring programming of students for the coming year.

Things may get pretty hectic, though, when counselors attempt to carry on parent conferences along with their other duties. More after-school, evening, or Saturday conferences may need to be arranged to accommodate the busy schedules of both students and their parents. Here again, a local decision is called for.

Invitation to Parents

Letters to parents inviting them to attend the conferences should be cordial in tone, clear, and complete.

Following are samples of simple invitation letters, one designed for summer conferences and the other for those held during the school year. When time permits, it is advantageous for the school to inform students about the conferences in advance and to ask them to discuss the program with their parents before the letters are received.

Sample Invitation Letters

Date _____

Dear Parents:

As a part of our counseling program this summer, our counselors are scheduling conferences with all incoming freshman students and their parents. The purpose of the conferences is to acquaint students and their parents with our high school, to review the selection of courses for next year, and to plan a tentative program for the following three years.

We have scheduled (date, time) for (student's name) and you to meet with a counselor in the Guidance Office at the high school. We will expect to see you at that time. If that time is not convenient for you, please call (school's number) and another time will be arranged.

Sincerely yours,

(signature)

Director of Guidance
or
student's counselor

Date _____

Dear Parents:

As a part of our counseling program for all sophomore (or other grade level) students you are invited to meet with (student's name) and a counselor to discuss results from tests, vocational plans, and to review a planned schedule of courses to be taken in high school.

The conference has been scheduled for (date, time) in the Guidance Office at the high school. We will expect to see you at that time. If that time is not convenient for you, please call (school's number) and another time will be arranged.

Sincerely yours,

(signature)

Director of Guidance
or
student's counselor

Evaluation of Conferences

If one objective of the conferences is to get parents involved in their children's educational plans, one simple evaluation is to keep a record of the number of parents who show up for the conferences--the higher the percentage of attendance, the better.

The experience of one school in the San Francisco Bay Area may be worth reporting on this score. Of 467 students in the 11th grade, 92 per cent were represented by one or both parents at the conferences. Only eight per cent of the parents could not attend or were not interested.

Both parents came in 24 per cent of the conferences, mothers only in 69 per cent, and fathers only in seven per cent.

Ninety per cent of the conferences were scheduled during the day.

One letter to parents and a confirming telephone call brought out 54 per cent of the families. Another 33 per cent came after one change in the date of appointment. And the remaining 13 per cent made it after two or more changes in date of appointment.

Seventy per cent of those parents who attended took the time to fill out and return the parents' reactionnaires provided by the school. Parents responded to nearly every item of the check-list type but only one of three parents made general comments when asked to do so.

Parental Reactions

Schools use parent-reaction forms of one kind or another to answer questions such as:

Did the parent feel the conference was worthwhile?

Did the parent get to discuss what he wanted to?

Did he get the information he wanted?

Did he want another conference in a year or so?

How could the conference be improved?

Student Responses

Perhaps the most important outcome of all is how much help did the student himself get from the conference.

One measure of this outcome--indeed, one measure of the value of the entire guidance service--is the soundness of the student's educational plan, and the ability he acquires as he goes along to carry out that plan or wisely amend it as his circumstances change.

This kind of evaluation or judgment is difficult to make--but not impossible. The student's continual appraisal of his own plan is one part of it. His counselor's judgment is another. His parents' reaction is still another. Subsequent achievement (or failure) in following through various steps in the plan provides further evidence on which to measure soundness of the plan.

This kind of evaluation is a continuing process. And the evaluation of the conference is but one step or check point in that process. However, it contributes to the picture as a whole.

Selected Forms

The following forms used by various high schools in student-parent-counselor conferences have been selected for inclusion in this final section as illustrations of effective means of securing parental and student reactions to the experience of participating in such conferences.

SELECTED FORMS USED IN STUDENT-PARENT-COUNSELOR CONFERENCES

- - - - - - - - - - -

Anaheim Union High School District: Parent response

We would appreciate your taking a few moments to fill out this questionnaire regarding today's counseling conference and returning it in the addressed envelope.

PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSE

1. Did the conference help you to a better understanding of your son's or daughter's educational strengths? YES NO

---

2. Did the conference help you to a better understanding of your son's or daughter's educational weaknesses? YES NO

---

3. Were the test scores interpreted in a way you could understand?
YES NO

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4. In what areas was the conference most helpful?
   a. Test Information
   b. Vocational Information
   c. Scholarship Information
   d. College and University Information
   e. High School Programming
   f. _____

5. In what areas would you have liked more information?
   a. Test Information
   b. Vocational Information
   c. Scholarship Information
   d. College and University Information
   e. High School Programming
   f. _____

6. Should a similar conference program be continued? YES NO
   If answer is "yes", at what grade level?
   7 8 9 10 11 12

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS -- Please add any information you care to.

Anaheim Union High School District: Student response

Please indicate by check marks in the appropriate column how much help you think you received during the student-parent-counselor conference.

The conference helped me:	Helped very much	Helped some	Not sure	No help	Not a problem
1. To a better understanding of my abilities and interests	___	___	___	___	___
2. To select educational and vocational goals consistent with my aptitudes or abilities	___	___	___	___	___
3. To determine what my post-high school plans must be	___	___	___	___	___
4. To understand what my scholarship attainments must be to realize these goals	___	___	___	___	___
5. To understand financial problems of post-high school education	___	___	___	___	___
6. To work out a schedule of classes for this year that has been satisfactory	___	___	___	___	___
7. To develop a mutual understanding with my parents as to my educational and vocational goals	___	___	___	___	___

Fremont Union High School District: Parent pre-conference check list

1. Check one only, please.

   We anticipate that our child will complete a high school program preparing him for:

   a state college____, a junior college____, a university____,

   a business school____, a job directly after high school____.

2. In relation to other students and with what you have observed at this stage of development, how do you rate your child in each of the following categories?

	Estimates of Ability				
	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Superior	Can't Answer
1. Ability to understand written words and ideas	____	____	____	____	____
2. Ability in math	____	____	____	____	____
3. Level of achievement in elementary school	____	____	____	____	____
4. General ability	____	____	____	____	____
5. Chances of success in English courses in high school	____	____	____	____	____
6. Chances of success in foreign language courses in high school	____	____	____	____	____
7. Chances of success in math courses in high school	____	____	____	____	____
8. Chances of success in science in high school	____	____	____	____	____
9. Chances of success in business and/or industrial arts courses in high school	____	____	____	____	____

Lodi Union High School District: Parent response

The conference enabled me	Check column which best describes the help you received: Considerable	Adequate	Inadequate	None
to understand my son or daughter's program for next year				
to discuss my son or daughter's strengths and weaknesses regarding school				
to get information about questions we had				

Comment if you wish:

Lodi Union High School District: Student response (on separate sheet)

The conference enabled me	Check column which best describes the help you received: Considerable	Adequate	Inadequate	None
to select my program for next year				
to discuss my strengths and weaknesses regarding school				
to feel more confident about coming to high school				
to get information about questions I had				

Comment if you wish:

Lynwood Unified School District: Parent response

We are requesting your cooperation in evaluating the student-parent-counselor conference you had recently with a member of the Lynwood High School Guidance Department.

Will you please complete this questionnaire and return it in the enclosed addressed envelope.

I. Was the conference of value? Yes_____ No_____

Comment:

II. Were the school program and opportunities available to students adequately covered?

Yes_____ No_____

Comment:

III. Did you have sufficient opportunity to discuss the particular aspects of your child's development which are of concern to you?

Yes_____ No_____

Comment:

IV. Do you feel better acquainted with the school program and more welcome to visit?

Yes_____ No_____

Comment:

V. What changes in procedure for future conferences would you recommend?

This questionnaire may, but need not, be signed. Thank you for your cooperation and assistance.

Pittsburg Unified School District: Parent response

The Pittsburg Unified School District is interested in your reactions regarding the summer counseling interview held with your child's counselor.

Please complete the opinionnaire and return it in the self-addressed envelope. Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

1. Your child is a: (Check one) Boy ___ Girl ___

2. Who attended the summer interview? (Check one)

Parents Only	Child and Guardian	Child and Father	Child and Mother	Child and Parents
___	___	___	___	___

3. How did you feel about the interview? (Check one)

Not helpful	A little helpful	Moderately helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful
___	___	___	___	___

4. In what area or areas did you feel you received the most help for your child?

Programming for 7th grade	Educational or school planning for 7-8-9 grades	Vocational or job preparation	Personal problems	Learning about Jr. High
___	___	___	___	___

5. How often would you like to have a similar interview? (Check one)

Once is enough	Every 3 years	Every 2 years	Every year
_____	_____	_____	_____

6. What, in your opinion, was the most helpful thing about your interview?

7. What would you suggest for future interviews?

Other comments:

Roseville Union High School: Parent response*

Please check in the appropriate column which best describes the degree of accomplishment:

The conference enabled us:	Considerable	Adequate	Inadequate	None
1. to think through college plans with our son or daughter				
2. to understand our son's or daughter's abilities and achievements in relation to college plans				
3. to understand our son's or daughter's abilities and interests in relation to occupations				
4. to understand how our son or daughter feels about his or her educational plans				

We needed more help on _____

The counselor was: (underline one) Very Well Prepared Adequately Prepared Somewhat Unprepared

The conference was: (underline one) VERY HELPFUL OF SOME VALUE OF NO PARTICULAR VALUE DISAPPOINTING STIMULATING SATISFACTORY DULL

Other telephone contacts or interviews during the school year _____
number

Purpose of interviews _____

Please make any comments and/or suggestions for improvement:

_____

_____
Name (optional)

*The same form with modified wording was used to obtain student response

Sanger Union High School: Parent and student response

Recently you participated in a parent-pupil-counselor conference for students entering Sanger Union High School. Your help in evaluating that conference will be most appreciated in our study of this program.

Pink form - Students

Yellow form - Parents

PLEASE CHECK THE APPROPRIATE BLANK - If uncertain, check "?"

In your recent conference:	YES	?	NO
1. Did you receive adequate information about the various high school programs and opportunities?	___	___	___
2. Did you receive additional insight about the abilities and interests of the entering student?	___	___	___
3. Did you have adequate time and opportunity to ask questions that concerned you?	___	___	___
4. Do you feel that this conference will help you to make improved decisions about future education?	___	___	___
5. Do you feel that your conference was a valuable expenditure of your time?	___	___	___
6. Do you recommend that such conferences be continued?	___	___	___

Please make any other comments or suggestions you wish to make in regard to the parent-pupil-counselor conferences.

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The following California school districts have contributed to the preparation of this publication by submitting descriptions of programs and copies of forms used in conducting student-parent-counselor conferences. Their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

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Coronado Unified School District
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East Side Union High School District
Excelsior Union High School District
Fowler Union High School District
Fremont Union High School District
Fresno City Unified School District
Fullerton Union High School and
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Glenn County Union High School District
Huntington Beach Union High School District
Lincoln Unified School District
Lodi Union High School District
Los Gatos Joint Union High School District
Live Oak Union High School District
Lynwood Unified School District
Madera Union High School District
Oroville Union High School District
Palo Alto Unified School District
Paradise Unified School District
Pittsburg Unified School District
Porterville Union High School District
Richmond Union High School District
Red Bluff Union High School District
Roseville Union High School District
Sanger Union High School District
San Leandro Unified School District
San Luis Obispo City Schools
San Mateo Union High School District
Santa Paula Union High School District
Taft Union High School District
Tamalpais Union High School District
Torrance Unified School District
Trona Unified School District
West Covina Unified School District